

**MAY 12 -
AUGUST 12,
2022**

**COLLECTIVE
EXHIBITION:**

Qamar Abdulmalik,
Sawsan Al Bahar,
Afra Al Suwaidi,
Amani Al Thuwani,
Khawla Almarzooqi,
Negin Fallah,
Annie Kurkdjian,
Alymamah Rashed,
Maria Shapranova
and Amina Yahia

Curated by Céline Azem, Mara Firetti and Océane Saily

Firetti Contemporary is pleased to present ***Eyes Wide Shut***, a collective exhibition including ten women artists from the UAE, Iran, Armenia, Ukraine, Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Kuwait.

The exhibition embodies a visual exploration of a wide range of socio-political issues through multidisciplinary mediums, such as painting, collage, video, and installation. *Eyes Wide Shut* is a dialogue of individual styles by women artists belonging to three different generations (Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z) who, whilst navigating their own path, question familiar narratives and shed light on pressing issues.

Collectively, the artists in *Eyes Wide Shut* investigate a variety of themes, including cultural and gender identity; interpersonal relationships; and more broad sociopolitical dynamics, both in their locale and beyond. Individually, their probing investigations stir discussions and draw attention to their diverse and varied experiences as they adopt a personal, intimate lens. Following this line of inquiry, each artist conveys the struggles and conflicts they encounter as women, both privately and publicly, while bringing together fresh perspectives and approaches

to both traditional and new mediums. With the intent to reveal the new forms of consciousness that have emerged in recent years, the featured works transcend gender and cultural differences, venturing into a more universal sense of human nature.

These women challenge preconceived notions and expose blind spots; they teach us to see and think anew. *Eyes Wide Shut* is thus an invitation to shift our perspectives and to open our eyes to the realities of our contemporary world.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

The theme of war and displacement are recurring amongst the artists in *Eyes Wide Shut*. The paintings by **Annie Kurkdjian** are a “breathing tragedy” that interrogate us about life itself, compelling viewers to contemplate the process of creation. Through her works, Kurkdjian depicts her trauma caused by sixteen years of civil war within her homeland, Beirut, Lebanon and the traumatism of the Armenian genocide lived through the history of her grandmother. Her childhood was marked by the noise of bombs, terror, permanent insecurity and the inconsistency of ordinary things. Her paintings are sober and at the same time powerful, they portray beings in tortured postures, monstrous, grotesque. Sometimes they fixate on the beholder, with a numb eye and vaulted shoulders, as if harassed or lost. According to Kurkdjian, the answers lurk in the sincerity of the artistic approach: “Art is capable of sublimating everything, war, crime, shame, sickness and total hell”.

Young Ukrainian artist, **Maria Shapranova**, on the other hand, highlights the current tragedies taking place in Ukraine. Maria’s mixed-media collages reflect on the resilience and strength of women in Ukraine against their current battle with Russia. Her practice involves collage, where she constructs a new reality using existing elements from magazines, photos, etc. Her works are bold and filled with pride for Ukraine, Ukrainians, who are sacrificing their lives and fighting for freedom. Ukrainian culture symbolism is shown in every detail of her collages.

The ongoing tragedy in Ukraine and the loss of a homeland is presented once again through the works of **Amani Al Thuwani**. The multidisciplinary artist was born and spent her early childhood in Ukraine constantly watching fairytales such as *The Nut Cracker* and avidly drawing stories of love and weddings including

brides with long braids, folk headpieces and big dresses. After relocating to Kuwait, she discovered the local marriage traditions and rituals that became the starting point of a work that analyzes her cultural identities while questioning the commodification of marriage and luxury-consumer culture. For this exhibition, Al Thuwaini convokes in a dream-like manner her childhood memories and confronts them with contemporary realities while paying tribute to her native city, Kharkiv. For Althuwani, the current destruction of Ukraine both annihilates the possibility of one day reconnecting with the places of her early years and presenting them to her children. Art then becomes a way to preserve and pass along these memories against the attempted erasure of a country.

For multidisciplinary Saudi-based Palestinian artist **Oamar Abdulmalik**, art is a way to bring forth her personal experiences as a Palestinian refugee and the global systems that impact the Arab diasporas. For this exhibition, Abdulmalik invites us into a surreal journey where her alter ego is transported by an elevator into a fairy-tale world made of papier-mâché. The sixth floor transposes the office of the same number at the Egyptian embassy in Riyadh that handles identity papers for Palestinian refugees, thus bringing focus to the seemingly mundane day-to-day happenings that are prominent struggles in the lives of undocumented immigrants. Layering her distinctive dark humour with a childlike, enchanting dimension, *Cut and Paste Dreams*, evokes the artist's intimate experience while emphasizing the power of dreams to transform reality.

By combining contemporary architecture production processes with traditional art production techniques, Syrian artist **Sawsan Al Bahar**, explores "looking at the meaning of Time to the people of the Middle East", often by referencing the past and addressing the issues and events of the 19th and 20th century. Al Bahar is inspired by themes of time, politics, and history within the Middle East, and aims to record history through her work and document the states that are singular to this region. Al Bahar emphasizes the fact that art is a mirror to history and society.

In the works of Iranian artist, **Negin Fallah**, we encounter a constant dialogue between chaos and harmony. Her artworks are depictions of figurative forms, scripts and symbols, benefiting from various fine arts genres. She transforms scenes into metaphorical images that are deeply touched by personal stories, philanthropic ideals, and inspirations from oriental themes and landscapes. In *Eyes*

Wide Shut, Fallah's works explore unrealistic societal expectations that tend to define the positional role of females as whether a daughter, a sister, a wife and most importantly a mother. Fallah highlights the women of faith, those who have been historically playing a pivotal role in challenging gender inequality, and those who continue to defy stereotypes in politics, and societies.

Emirati artist, **Afra Al Suwaidi** creates works that defy "expectations". In *Eyes Wide Shut*, Al Suwaidi reveals the perseverance of powerful women of the Middle East through a series of mixed media collage works. These works investigate the public versus the private domain, as they both relate differently to the untold stories of women stigmatized, stifled, and forgotten beneath cultural and societal constraints. Al Suwaidi's work challenges these notions to "uncover the authentic experiences of women, let voices, so often silenced, be heard, share their stories to give international audiences insight into their conditions and most importantly empower women around the world."

Young Emirati artist **Khawla Al Marzooqi** similarly reflects on the everyday life of Khaleeji women, drawing inspiration from her own life and conversations with women from all walks of life. Her practice is marked by a sense of childishness, which comes from communicating with and healing her inner child. Al Marzooqi is fuelled by the desire to master the ability, through painterly technique, to 'show' the real anger and emotion that comes with being a woman.

Topics of identity and environment are further explored by **Alymamah Rashed** a Kuwaiti visual artist who investigates the discourse of her own body, fluctuating between the east and the west. Her work negotiates her female subjectivity, regional folklore, and the banal objects that she encounters in her everyday life. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, Rashed presents a large new work that weaves a poetic series in which rare remnants of nature become a metaphor for the artist's spiritual journey, the relationship to her body, and depicting the spirit of her encounterings as a saviour for her soul.

Egyptian artist **Amina Yahia** explores Womanhood and its many definitions especially those pervading Egyptian society today. Through the use of elements of realism, Yahia highlights how untruthful narratives are perpetuated to justify the oppression of women, and to the wider societal and governmental obsession with

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controlling women's bodies, autonomy, and desire, especially concerning her home, Egypt.

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/exhibitions/15-eyes-wide-shut-through-the-lens-of-her/overview/>

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

BIOGRAPHY

QAMAR ABDULMALIK



Qamar Abdulmalik is a Palestinian graphic designer and inter-disciplinary artist based in Riyadh. Using collage, video art, and new media, Abdulmalik creates installations that draw from her personal experiences as a Palestinian refugee, the global systems that impact the Arab diasporas, and brings focus to the seemingly mundane day-to-day happenings that are prominent struggles in the lives of undocumented immigrants. She discusses it from her perspective using surreal and interactive methods with dark humour as an important element to express and connect with the audience.

Abdulmalik has exhibited at Art Jameel Photography award-AJPA (2016), Live demo (2017, Jeddah), EpicenterX (2017, Detroit), Desert to Delta (2017, Utah), MNWR at almakan (2018, Jeddah), YSA at Athr Gallery (2019, Jeddah), 21,39 Jeddah Arts (Jeddah, 2021), and Al Safa Art and Design Library (2022, Dubai). Her films were also selected for the Red Sea Film Festival (2020, Jeddah) and Gulf Metaverse 2.0 Film Festival (2022, Doha).

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/artists/110-qamar-abdulmalik/overview/>

BIOGRAPHY

SAWSAN AL BAHAR



Born in Damascus (1990) but Raised in Sharjah, Sawsan Al Bahar is a Syrian architect and artist, trained in architecture and visual media. Al Bahar approaches art and printmaking as a cross-disciplinary practice, through which she gears her past influences from her architecture background towards the production of art, combining contemporary architecture production processes with traditional art production techniques. Al Bahar's subject matter lies in looking at the meaning of Time to the people of the Middle East, often by referencing the past and addressing the issues and events of the 19th and 20th centuries. Al Bahar is inspired by themes of time, politics, and history within the Middle East, and aims to record history through her work and document the states that are singular to this region.

Al Bahar has participated in numerous national exhibitions and galleries including Art Dubai (2022, Dubai), Sikka Art Fair (2015, Dubai), Made in Tashkeel (2015, Dubai), and Abu Dhabi Music and Art Festival (2015).

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/artists/108-sawsan-al-bahar/overview/>

BIOGRAPHY

AFRA AL SUWAIDI



Afra Salman Al Suwaidi, Emirati born in 1992. She specialized in fine arts and received a BA Degree from Zayed University in 2016. Al Suwaidi participated in several shows locally and internationally. In 2015 she participated in Rochester Contemporary Art Center New York and Lessedra World Art Print Annual Exhibition in Sofia, Bulgaria. In 2017 she participated in Imago Mundi in Treviso, Italy. And most recently she participated in Abu Dhabi art's first exhibition abroad Beyond: emerging artists program In London in Cromwell place.

Locally Al Suwaidi presented her work in the Art Exhibition in Alliance Française Abu Dhabi and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi: *Do Art Do It Now*, Manarat Al Saadiyat in 2017. In 2018, she participated in the 35th Annual Exhibition of the Emirates Fine Arts Society in Sharjah, UAE. In 2020, she participated in the Cultural Foundation Art Residency. Al Suwaidi participated in engage 101 "Outside in, Inside out" in Bait15 Abu Dhabi and Abu Dhabi art "Beyond: Emerging Artists" in Manarat Al Saadiyat. Work in progress show by Bleep in Aisha Alabbar Art Gallery, Dubai. In 2021, she exhibited in ArtSpace, a collaboration between The Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi and ALDAR properties. Most recently she participated in the 37th Annual Exhibition of the Emirates Fine Arts Society in Sharjah, UAE.

Al Suwaidi is a recipient of the Cultural Foundation Art Residency 2020.

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/artists/109-afra-al-suwaidi/overview/>

BIOGRAPHY

AMANI AL THUWANI



Amani (b. 1989 Ukraine) finished her MFA degree at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2017. She also attended an exchange program at the Prague Academy of Art, Architecture and Design (UMPRUM) during the MFA period. Amani holds a Bachelor of Architecture from Kuwait University and has worked as an architect, designer and in Education. In 2018 she was selected to attend the International Designer's workshop at the V&A Museum and showed work in Europe and the Middle East.

Being half Kuwaiti, half Ukrainian identity and memory have always been the driving force behind Amani's work. She often finds herself in a position of an outsider observing eye, searching for a place where both identities come together. Her architectural background informs and influences the way she collects data, plans and works. Her work aims to put behaviours and rituals that are often taken for granted under a magnifying lens. She explores themes of luxury, display and socio-political issues relevant to Kuwait and the Gulf region. In her interdisciplinary approach, she aims to combine individual and collective narratives with symbols which are open to different cultural interpretations. Her materials are memories, social behaviour and accumulating objects, specifically those used in rituals in traditional societies.

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Her mixed media work proposes “cultural otherness” as a type of mimetic economy of reciprocal exchange. In her large wall-based sculptural forms, Modernism, commodity fetishism, gender and power are made manifest in exquisitely crafted hybrid objects. In her latest series of works, She's been exploring dowry rituals and dowry objects in Islamic culture, specifically their transformation in The Middle East. Trade and capitalism blurred the lines between East and West which affected the processes of these rituals. Dowry gifting objects and their content are embodiments of these collisions of cultures. She showed her works in Prague's national library as well as group exhibitions in London and Kuwait. Her work was part of the Bolivia Biennale, and she also represented Sheikh Abdulla alsalem cultural centre through In my dream I was in Kuwait exhibition in Venice in 2019.

Amani's print works were chosen to be part of the Acts of Looking projection series on the exterior of The Royal Festival Hall in London in 2016, from the Southbank Center's Women Of The World festival. Her installation work was also shortlisted for BLOOM AWARD BY WARSTEIN in 2017. In 2022 Amani was part of an exhibition called Forbidden love in Arab Art in Dar Alfunoun Kuwait.

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/artists/116-amani-althuwani/overview/>

BIOGRAPHY

KHAWLA AL MARZOOQI



Khawla Al Marzooqi (b. 1998) is a visual artist who works primarily with digital media and paintings.

Her work is about gender, trauma, femininity, and philosophy. Al Marzooqi takes her everyday experiences as a woman and translates them into artworks, mixing humour and bright colours with her often grim topics.

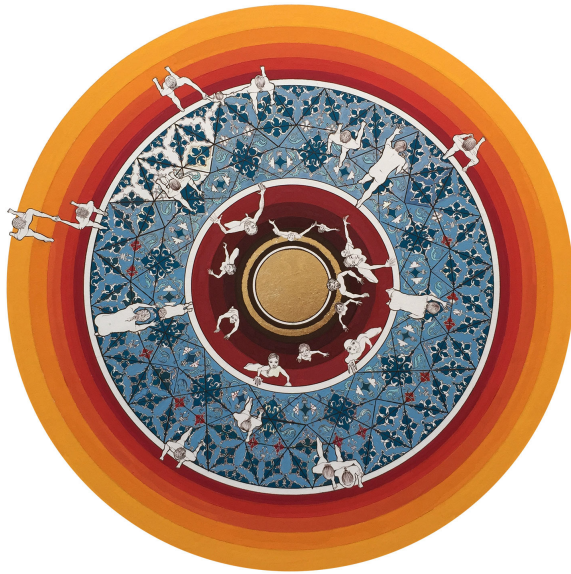
Her approach involves creating stages and playsets in her art rather than capturing the scenes as they are. We stage life as if it is a movie or a play and her work reflects that coping mechanism.

Al Marzooqi's work has been exhibited at Sikka Art Fair, Al Habtoor palace, and Tashkeel. She also published a comic as part of the comic digest "corniche" organized by the Sharjah Art Foundation.

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/artists/113-khawla-almarzooqi/overview/>

BIOGRAPHY

NEGIN FALLAH



Negin Fallah (b. 1985) was raised in Tehran, Iran. In 2006 she started her artistic career and almost after a decade of travel and exploration, she developed her style in Persian miniature and manuscript illumination (*Tazhib*) to reflect the aspirations of the present-day society. Fallah is a self-taught painter with an avid appetite for innovative concepts and illustrations. By incorporating contemporary elements while remaining connected with traditional art heritage, her work reflects closely her culture and traditions.

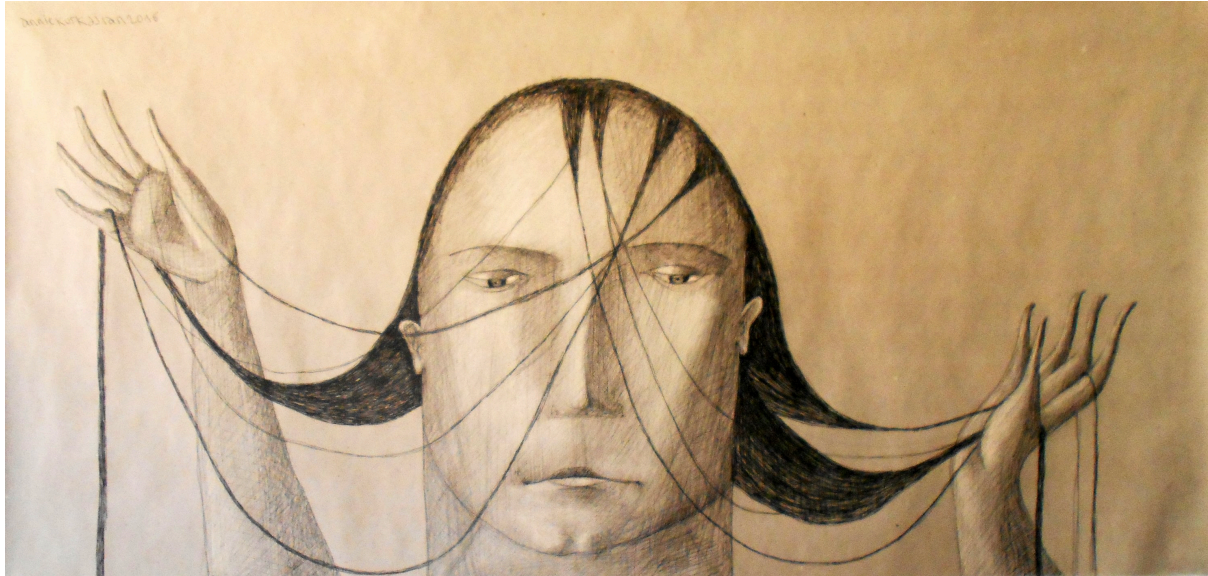
In parallel, her academic education in the fields of graphic design (AA) at Hafez University, Tehran and interior design (BA) at Lebanese International University, Lebanon, and professional practice in the fields of graphic design and interior architecture, have enriched her visual and conceptual expression substantially. The artworks are depictions of figurative forms, scripts and symbols, benefiting from various fine arts genres. She transforms scenes into metaphorical images that are deeply touched by personal stories, philanthropic ideals, and inspirations from oriental themes and landscapes. Fallah's unique style emerges from a profound exploration of painting, drawing, and design practices, including Persian illuminations, Chinese paintings, and Indus miniatures.

Fallah's paintings' aesthetics present a constant dialogue between chaos and harmony, presence and absence, and creation and destruction. They are depictions of figurative forms, scripts and symbols, which entail the transformation of scenes into metaphorical images that are deeply touched by her personal stories, the culture and politics of her homeland of Iran, philanthropic ideas, environmental and ecological phenomenon. Space and perspective in Fallah's paintings are reminiscent of Persian miniature paintings, while the sensibility of figures comes from her relationship with Western classical paintings.

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/artists/33-negin-fallah/overview/>

BIOGRAPHY

ANNIE KURKDIJIAN



Annie Kurkdjian (b. 1972) had to endure sixteen years of civil war within her homeland, Beirut, Lebanon. Her childhood was marked by the noise of bombs, terror, permanent insecurity and the inconsistency of ordinary things. Originally Armenian, Kurkdjian has previously faced the traumatism of the Armenian genocide through the history of her grandmother.

At the age of twelve, when her family was preparing to flee Lebanon for France, she lost her father. As a young adolescent Kurkdjian suffered from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and realized that she had to find an outlet for the distress that was imprinted. After a period of trying to find her niche, leading through studies of management, art, followed by psychology and ultimately theology, Kurkdjian decided to turn the page in 2005 and started a new life as an artist, with regular expositions in France, Lebanon, Bahrain, Jordan and several other countries. Kurkdjian paintings are sober and at the same time powerful, they portray beings in tortured postures, monstrous, grotesque. Sometimes they fixate on the beholder, with a numb eye and vaulted shoulders, as if harassed or lost. The subject of the works appear to be dissected and analyzed. They form shivery and poignant images. These big canvases breathing tragedy interrogate us about life itself and compel the viewer to contemplate the process of creation. According to Kurkdjian, the answers lurk in the sincerity of the artistic approach: "Art is capable of sublimating everything, war, crime, shame, sickness and total hell".

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/artists/31-annie-kurkdjian/overview/>

BIOGRAPHY

ALYAMAMAH RASHID



Alymamah Rashed (b.1994, Kuwait) is a visual artist who looks into the discourse of her own body as a Muslim Cyborg, fluctuating between the east and the west. As a Muslim Cyborg, she collides her cultural references of home, between Kuwait and New York, and with the history of Islamic spiritualism. Her work negotiates her female subjectivity, regional folklore, and the everyday banal objects that Rashed encounters as well as the rapid social shifts that she has witnessed, such as the fast industrialisation of the Gulf region.

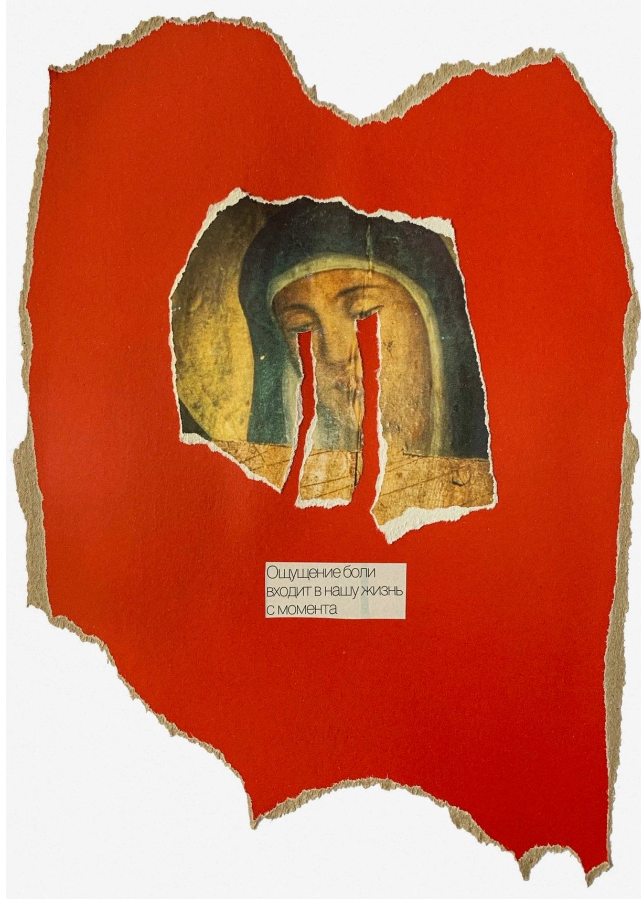
Alymamah Rashed received her MFA in Fine Arts at Parsons School of Design in 2019 and her BFA in Fine Arts at The School of Visual Arts in 2016. She participated in various exhibitions in New York City including the Czech Center, Parsol Projects, and The New School. In 2021, she had a virtual solo exhibition with Gallery Bawa (Kuwait) and one solo exhibition with Tabari Artspace (UAE). In 2022, she was part of the group exhibition 'Pathways' organized by Hunna Art gallery in collaboration with Raffles The Palm (UAE).

Alymamah Rashed is a recipient of the Masters' Scholarship and the Merit Scholarship program by the Kuwait Ministry of Higher Education. She was also a fellow at the Professional Development Initiative Program sponsored by the National U.S-Arab Chamber of Commerce, Kuwait Ministry of Higher Education, Embassy of Kuwait, and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. Her work has been featured in numerous magazines worldwide.

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/artists/141-alymamah-rashed/overview/>

BIOGRAPHY

MARIA SHAPRANOVA



Maria Shapranova (b.1999) was born in the city of Mykolaiv, Ukraine. She holds a degree in Architecture and Urban Planning.

In recent years, Shapranova took up collage as her practice where she constructs new realities using existing elements. Her interest in collage came to her in 2020, during quarantine, where she managed to unleash emotions and thoughts that were born as a result of staying in a confined space due to lockdown.

The inspiration for her first collages was derived from her drawings. She later began to be inspired by and utilise magazines, photographs, objects, etc. Shapranova focuses on "femininity, feminism, women's freedom and empowerment" in her works. Her most recent works

highlight the injustice of the current war in Ukraine, with a focus on the strength and resilience of women throughout these events. She highlights how women hold society together during conflict and war.

She is currently living and working in Ukraine, far from her house, due to the Russian-Ukrainian war. Shapranova is also a resident of the first modern collage workshop CUTOUT COLLAGE STUDIO.

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/artists/111-maria-shapranova/overview/>

BIOGRAPHY

AMINA YAHIA



Amina Yahia (b. 2000) is an Egyptian painter and visual artist based between Cairo and Abu Dhabi. Often incorporating aspects of realism, her work explores Womanhood and its many definitions especially those pervading Egyptian society today. She is fondly curious about themes of human interaction like autonomy and desire, and addresses similar ones like propagated repression and the paradoxes arising from placing such volatile topics onto the same canvas.

Yahia explores the idea of control, both in terms of how women's roles are determined by society and reinforced by the state. She often portrays "complex notions of autonomy that are often almost nonexistent for most Egyptian women, with subtle differences that are enforced by their social class." She calls out all those who perpetuate untruthful narratives to justify the oppression of women, and to the wider societal and governmental obsession with controlling women's bodies, autonomy, and desire.

Yahia has shown her work at Warehouse421, Maisan15 and Alserkal Avenue in Abu Dhabi and Dubai and is currently a fourth-year BA student at New York University Abu Dhabi.

More information here: <https://www.firetticontemporary.com/artists/112-amina-yahia/overview/>